2006

How youth in transitional housing perceive the independent living program and aftercare services at Cameron Hill

Savannah VanKummer
Richard Vela

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2987

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
HOW YOUTH IN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PERCEIVE THE
INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM AND AFTERCARE
SERVICES AT CAMERON HILL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Savannah VanKummer
Richard Vela
June 2006
HOW YOUTH IN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PERCEIVE THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM AND AFTERCARE SERVICES AT CAMERON HILL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Savannah VanKummer
Richard Vela
June 2006

Approved by:

Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor
Social Work

Ms. Nikohl Thurston-Venable, Director,
Cameron Hill Aftercare Services

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the perspectives of emancipated youth who qualified to participate in Cameron Hill’s transitional housing aftercare program in San Bernardino, California. Data was collected via short, face-to-face interviews on-site with all eight residents. The findings indicated that despite participants’ perceived shortcomings of the services at Cameron Hill, all eight residents were able to verbalize a specific life plan once they exit aftercare, and more than half named specific college majors they plan to pursue. Implications for social work practice, policy and research include educating foster youth about after care services years before they reach the age of emancipation. Further implications include the necessity for periodic evaluative interviews with transitional housing participants by non-aftercare social workers to assess and report on the level of housing quality, and to substantiate that a maximum level of empowerment-based services are being provided in a manner that embraces client dignity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We give our deepest thanks to our Faculty Supervisor Dr. Janet Chang for all her help, to Cameron Hill Aftercare Services Director, Ms. Nikol Thurston-Venable, and to the staff and residents at Cameron Hill.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the entire Cameron Hill community for making this possible. Thank you for your time and your candor. To the residents -- you are all winners, and we wish you the best in your endeavors.

We also wish to thank our families and friends for the many hours they have had to carry on life routines and events without our presence -- your sacrifices have not gone unnoticed. We appreciate you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................. iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement .................................................. 1
Policy Context ...................................................... 6
Practice Context .................................................... 7
Purpose of the Study ................................................ 9
Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice ................. 13

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction .......................................................... 16
Characteristics of Aged out Foster Youth ......................... 16
Transitional Housing Programs .................................. 18
Outcomes for Independent Living Participants ................. 21
Theories Guiding Conceptualization ............................. 26
Summary ............................................................. 31

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction .......................................................... 32
Study Design ......................................................... 32
Sampling .............................................................. 34
Data Collection and Instruments ................................. 34
Procedures ........................................................... 37
Protection of Human Subjects .................................... 38
Data Analysis ........................................................ 39
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Often youth who are transitioning from foster care to a life that is independent of the child welfare system are an overlooked population (Propp, 2003). While studies show that nearly half of these former foster youth reside in California and New York, teens approaching legal age represent about 30% of this population (Propp, 2003). These youth will soon become completely independent of the child welfare system and will face overwhelming challenges in making it on their own. Based upon a growing body of research, state and federal policymakers agree that this population faces overwhelming challenges placing them among the nation’s most vulnerable population (Ferrell, 2004).

After leaving foster care, 46% of emancipated youth have not completed high school, 25% have been homeless, and less than 20% are completely self-supporting (Ferrell, 2004). Many leave foster care without personal connections, support, or life skills (Elias, 2005). This happens, for the most part, because foster youth have
spent their developmental years in substitute care, and do not have the same type of parental support that youth with families of origin receive once they enter adulthood (Collins, 2001). Most adolescents have a safety net after turning 18 that includes relatives who can lend them money, co-sign documents, and cover them on insurance policies. This type of support is typically non-existent or sporadic for foster youth transitioning into adulthood (Ferrell, 2004).

Currently, nearly 800,000 American children spend time in foster care (Ferrell, 2004). As youth in foster care approach their eighteenth birthday, it often becomes a reality that family reunification will not be possible, and that they will age out of the system. The focus then changes from family attachment to independent living. Many adolescents, who experience this shift, have described it as cruel; they feel unprepared, insecure and unsure how to make a successful transition into adulthood (Propp, 2003). To make matters worse, the numbers of these unprepared youth are increasing annually. It is estimated that about 20,000 youths will emancipate or age out of foster care each year (Ferrell, 2004).
Having been compelled by child advocates to take action in the plight of these youths after emancipation, federal policymakers enacted the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Act of 1999 (Chaffee Act), which was designed to arm adolescents exiting foster care with independent living skills known as independent living programs (ILPs) and aftercare transitional housing. Prior to the Chaffee Act, as early as 1977, all 50 states had already begun developing such programs. The basic curriculum goal was to train emancipated youth to manage their money, clean an apartment, grocery shop, cook, find employment, and keep a job. Initially, this training began with older teens that were more than likely to age out, but in recent years, there has been a shift to include younger teens as well. California’s Early Start to Emancipation Program (ESTEP) is a prime example of this as they provide both outreach and training workshops for foster youths as young as 14 years of age (Eilerston, 2002).

Although operationalizing self-sufficiency has been described as a complex task, the numerous services that ILPs provide include more than teaching tangible skills such as education, vocation, budgeting, and the ability
to find housing. ILP programs also include intangible curriculums that provide training in areas such as social skills, decision-making, planning, effective communication, and the maintenance of high self-esteem (Propp, 2004). However, in spite of true benefits, these programs have not become a panacea to the problem. Unfortunately, with all of this training, statistics have remained consistent in showing that at least 25% of this population experience homelessness after exiting ILPs, less than 50% obtain gainful employment, and of that 50%, less than half maintain employment for more than a year (Choca, 2004).

Although there is room for improvement in after care services, ILPs are still the most contemporary and positive developments in existence to address the former foster youth population. However, while policymakers focus on the wellbeing of former foster youth, they are conflicted in their efforts since achieving independent living is not compatible with simultaneous efforts towards permanency planning, family preservation, reunification, and adoption (Propp, 2003). As a result, only a handful of studies provide current information on the lives of emancipated youth or adolescents who age out.
of the system (Elias, 2005). In fact, even the child welfare community knows little about the functioning of these youth once they emancipate.

To date, it is not clearly understood how much is gained by emancipated foster youth in aftercare independent living programs and transitional housing. Nor is it well known how these youths perceive the entire process and the shortcomings of the system. Clearly, the present situation necessitates further examination into the current level of unsuccessful transitions into self-sufficient adulthood by this population. In going forward, further research into existing front-line programs, such as independent living and aftercare programs within transitional living could help identify current gaps in policy practice and service, and consequently help direct future improvements.

This study proposes that valuable insight into the assessment and mitigation of this emancipation/self-sufficiency breakdown can be attained from further exploration into the experiences, perceptions and evaluations of the source, i.e. the youth who are current clients of the after care system.
Policy Context

Through the advocacy-efforts of the social work profession and through the increased interest of various concerned citizens nationwide, the problem of youth who have emancipated out of foster care without sufficient skills to live self-reliantly received significant government attention during the 1980s. As a result, various federal policies and programs were implemented to help each state assist foster youth, both before and after reaching the age of emancipation. Mahler and McCall state: "Initially a Federal Independent Living (FIL) Program was established in 1986 through the addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act" (2002, p. 3). However, Courtney et al., point out the inadequacy of the program in the assertion: "Unfortunately, federal funding did not keep pace with the growing number of eligible foster youth, and only a fraction of those who were eligible for services actually received them" (2005, p. 3).

In the 1990s, congress continued to make provisions to address the inadequacies by broadening the funds available to foster and emancipated youth. According to the California Department of Social Services (2005),
congress conceded the tremendous needs of youth ages sixteen to twenty-one years who were in foster care or who had emancipated from foster care through the enactment of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (PL 103-66) that permanently reauthorized the Independent Living Program (ILP) effective October 1, 1992. In 1999, the United States Legislature amended the Foster Care Independence Act (FICA) creating the John H. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program (Christenson, 2003). This program replaced the Title IV-E Independent Living Program and doubled the maximum amount of money that states could draw down each year to $140 million (Courtney et al., 2005). Undoubtedly, as the population increases in the new millennium and the number of children in long-term foster increase accordingly, congress will need to continue implementing corresponding increases in funding for ILP programs that can continue to mitigate the problems.

Practice Context

There are presently various non-profit and government-run agencies in the local communities providing resources to emancipated youths to help them become adept at living independently. Such provisions
include money, housing and training in self-care skills. According to Cameron Hill, Program Director, Nikki Thurston-Venable, MSW, among the various after-care ILP services that the Cameron Hill program provides is a transitional housing residence. The Cameron Hill aftercare workers select and place a limited number of emancipated youth (based on greatest need) in a ten-unit apartment. Mrs. Venable said that Cameron Hill aftercare workers provide case plans with emancipation goals for these youth known as transitional independent living plans. She emphasized that all residents of this transitional living residence are required to be employed, or make continual, verifiable efforts to seek employment as part of the condition for remaining in this program. This program allows youth to remain an average period of six to nine months, but up to a maximum period of twelve months in a strictly supervised apartment unit. Residence here must obey all the program rules or face expulsion. In addition, successful participation in this housing program means that each youth completed at least 80% of his or her case plan. Mrs. Venable noted that her vision is to have a large all-inclusive facility with not only a greater amount of housing units, but with all the
self-sufficiency producing programs that ILPs typically provide — all under one roof (personal communication, October 18, 2005).

Kevin Anderson, MSW, who serves as the Independent Living Skills Coordinator for San Bernardino County’s ILP program, commented that the county’s ILP program is extremely diversified. County social workers connect emancipation-aged youths to a myriad of independent-living skills trainings. The youths can take advantage of training programs that help make job applicants attractive to prospective employers, they can receive assistance with finding employment, managing finances, learning domestic skills like cooking, and the list goes on. Mr. Anderson explained that through the Chaffee Act emancipated youths could even receive tuition and financial aid to go all the way through four years of college. (Personal communication, October 18, 2005)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how emancipated youth, who are clients of the aftercare ILP (Independent Living Program) and transitional housing program with Cameron Hill, evaluate those services. The
outcome of this study could help identify current gaps in policy and services practices from the clients' perspective. Such insight could be of use to Cameron Hill administrators in directing future program changes that encompass the introspections of their at risk population.

Not unlike the average person, foster youth and former foster youth come into ILPs and transitional housing programs with a unique compilation of life-experiences that have shaped their personalities and their outlooks on every aspect of life. Unlike the average person, however, by the very nature of having been in foster care, these youths and their life-experiences are replete with atypical, long-term inconsistencies in the fulfillment of their basic developmental needs. It would come as no surprise that in many of these youths, their life experiences have created in them an immense pessimism toward outside support. The logical question follows: how is that managed by an ILP's policies?

Assuredly, the present structures of aftercare ILPs and transitional housing programs will suit some youth and complement their learning and motivational traits, but fall immensely short for others. Determining how to
make improvements to the current system makes it critical to understand the variations in those traits. Therefore, exploring and understanding the youths' experience, expectations, and evaluations of ILP and transitional living programs gives program administrators and reformers the insight toward making program improvements harmonized to the needs of individual participants for post-ILP success.

Currently, there is a shortage of research on the topic of client perceptions to aftercare ILP/transitional living - and to the resultant experiences of these youths after aftercare ILP completion. The majority of studies to-date focuses primarily on quantitative outcome data from youths who have completed ILP training. These studies look primarily at ILP graduate employment rates, ability to budget money, homelessness levels, and so on. Some research also tracks ILP post-participants in longitudinal studies to ascertain success rates. According to Loman and Siegel (2000), the most famous of these studies are the 1988 and 1991 Westat studies.

Admittedly, it makes sense that a quantitative approach is necessary in evaluating ILP’s and a transitional housing program’s overall effectiveness and
in helping developing further focal points for those areas, which the quantified data indicates is problematic. Quantitative studies are well proven in research and should be used to look at the myriad of organizational type problems affecting aftercare ILPs and transitional living programs. Problems related to such areas as, staffing, resource procurement, training curriculum, funding, etc. Nevertheless, researchers cannot ascertain all of the essential factors that comprise a program's assets or deficits using the quantitative method alone - especially not where the clients' dynamic, personal motivations are key factors. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach that is better suited to understanding the more subjective perceptions of the aftercare ILP/transitional housing participants through their own descriptions of what they think.

As affirmed initially, the focus of this study is to understand the clients' perceptions of aftercare ILPs and transitional housing programs qualitatively. In so doing, the goal is to discover aspects of the program that inspire and motivate the clients toward successful participation and completion of the program - and
likewise, to discover those aspects that precipitate apathy and failure. Eight youths, ages eighteen to twenty-one years who are enrolled in the Cameron Hills aftercare ILP and transitional housing program, will serve as research subjects for a convenience sample using face-to-face interviews to collect the essential data.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Each year, it is estimated that approximately 20,000 youths will age out of foster care. At the end of 5 years, this means that nearly 100,000 children with a history of abuse, neglect, and foster care drift will be required to transition into adulthood with the ability to live independently. While many services are in place to help cultivate skills in many of these individuals, with the goal of enabling them to live successful and independent lives, the expectation and the reality are at odds based on the current post-emancipation outcome statistics mentioned previously. However, with more documented feedback from youth regarding the effectiveness of available services, social work practitioners and policy makers will be able to make
better-informed decisions while bringing current updates from this population to the research pool.

New knowledge generated from this study is important because the knowledge base of the social work profession is built largely on the foundation of research. Findings from the study further the profession and practitioners’ understanding of society’s constantly changing social complexities. Conclusions of the study may also help the social work profession develop new approaches to dealing with problems commonly faced by the former foster youth population. Looking at the youth themselves for answers is a new idea for research and is bound to increase the knowledge base and skills of practitioners in dealing with this immense problem of failed self-sufficiency. Acquiring youths’ perspective on the effectiveness of after care and transitional housing programs will encourage practitioners working in the area of youth emancipation and self-reliance to see their clients as partners with whom to collaborate instead of as dependents of the system for whom to make arbitrary decisions. A better understanding in this area should spark improved child welfare response within the profession. When a better perspective is obtained
regarding a particular population, it can help all involved practitioners make better-informed choices to serve that population more effectively.

For the social work practitioner, this study will inform the evaluation phase of the generalist intervention process by gaining qualitative feedback regarding the effectiveness of the after care ILP and transitional housing program. In turn, the planning phase can be adjusted further as needed to enhance service effectiveness. In addition, by informing the evaluation phase of the generalist intervention process with this qualitative approach, it will expectantly answer the following question: How do youth in transitional housing perceive general ILP and aftercare services?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the basic characteristics of aged out foster youth. It is followed by a general overview of Transitional Housing Placement Programs, and literature on the latest reported outcomes for youth who have participated in these after care programs. This section ends with theories currently guiding conceptualization for this population, as well as final arguments supporting the need for the proposed study.

Characteristics of Aged out Foster Youth

Most eighteen-year-olds today continue to depend on parents and relatives well into their mid-twenties as they acquire the skills and experiences necessary to be self-sufficient. However, youths discharged from foster care can rarely count on having the same support. Aged out foster children are often estranged in some way from the very relationships that everyone should be able to depend upon (Loman, 2000). This is because most former foster youth have a history of neglect or abandonment by
immediate family members. In addition to this, aged out foster youth typically have developmental disabilities and/or emotional problems that compound their situation (Loman, 2000).

Because the transition period from late adolescence to adulthood is more abrupt for aged out youth than for the general population, former foster youth face a myriad of cognitive, psychological, physical and social challenges that characterize their development well beyond their eighteenth birthday (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Developmental disruptions and challenges that contribute to these poor outcomes include low educational attainment, homelessness, difficulty finding and maintaining employment, and constant financial hardships (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). When compounded with mental and physical health problems, these negative outcomes are overwhelming. In addition to this, societal expectations for aged out youth are synonymous with those who have familial ties, support and resources beyond the age of eighteen (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

"Couch surfing," which is when youth leaving care move from one friend's place to another, is another
popular characteristic of youth who age out of foster care. Underlying this trend are three related factors that predict a lack of future wellbeing: shallow relationships, low education, and low employment (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Without strength, and higher achievement in these three areas, youth are more likely to experience ongoing housing problems (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Many youth leave foster care without a strong, positive connection to a caring adult. They therefore have no one to depend on when things get difficult (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Research confirms what aged out youth and practitioners already know; youth in foster care are largely disadvantaged compared with the general population (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

Transitional Housing Programs

According to the Office of Children’s Administration (2004), most youth are not receiving the necessary basic skills and knowledge in foster care to transition into adulthood. As a result, they are making poor choices that have long-term consequences, such as pregnancy, crime and drugs. The administration believes that foster youth need
more concrete services in areas regarding daily living skills, which include the ability to find housing and secure gainful employment. In addition to this, former foster youth who have experienced sexual abuse, severe neglect and/or abandonment need special attention during counseling in order to help them cope with any residual trauma (Office of Children’s Administration, 2004).

One concrete approach to improving ILP services is Transitional Housing Placement Programs (THPP). A statewide report titled, The Report on the Housing Needs of Emancipated Foster/Probation Youth (2002) indicated that 65% of the youth who emancipated from foster care during the 2000-2001 fiscal year were in need of safe and affordable housing. To address this problem, AB 1119 (Chapter 639, 2002) was passed to assist counties in their efforts to provide housing for this population. As a result, California has twenty-four counties, which altogether hold more than 100 transitional housing programs statewide.

The Foster Youth Alliance Project in Alameda, California, where approximately 500 youth age out of foster care each year is an example of the THPP in action. In 2000, the Casey Family Foundation partnered
with several agencies to help emancipated youth in Alameda County obtain rental housing through a master-leasing program (Choca, 2004). After identifying the specific housing needs of the former foster youth in Alameda, this special collaboration worked as a liaison between former foster youth tenants and landlords (Choca, 2004). In conjunction with this work, the Casey Foundation formed relationships among nonprofit builders and developers, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), city housing authority officials, and the Alameda County’s ILP staff (Choca, 2004). Fortunately, regional collaborations such as these have been gaining momentum in California since 2000 (Choca, 2004).

At the same time, solely providing housing for emancipating foster youth without appropriate supportive services that promote employment, education, and emotional wellbeing is a recipe for failure regardless of any goodwill collaborations (Choca, 2004). Transitional and permanent housing for youth formerly in foster care built and sustained through thoughtful collaboration and supported by sound programming emphasizing educational attainment, employment preparation and work experience,
and personal growth and development is the only formula for success (Choca, 2004).

Outcomes for Independent Living Participants

All youth emancipating from foster care must amass a tremendous amount of knowledge in order to function self-sufficiently in society. Unlike their peers who are usually able to rely on support from family members, emancipated youth have limited options when transitioning to adulthood. In a New York City-based study of independent living programs (ILPs), outcome data was generated to monitor the effectiveness of the program. The setting was an Independent Living Apartment Program, and the population consisted of 46 males ages 16-20 at the time of admission (Loman, 2000). The study showed that three-fourths of the sample completed high school or obtained a GED (Loman, 2000). Other than this, very little in-depth research is available regarding the specific outcome of emancipated youth who are enrolled in transitional housing. However, since transitional housing programs utilize after care services, and after care services incorporate ILP programs, the following information gives a general overview of various outcomes.
Although the Westat study is now well over a decade old, it remains the most comprehensive research regarding the outcomes of youths who have aged out of foster care (Loman & Siegal, 2000). This is because the Westat research involved an impressive representative national sample of 1,644 youths discharged from care during 1987 and 1988 (Loman, 2000). While examining the Title IV-E Foster Care Independent Living programs and the independent living service needs of foster care youths, the study also examined the relation of various measures of outcomes two to four years after youths were discharge from life skills training programs (Loman, 2000).

The findings revealed that 25% percent of the youth had been homeless for at least one night, 46% percent still lacked a high school diploma, and less than 50% attained gainful employment. Out of those who were able to secure jobs, only 38% percent maintained employment for at least one year. In addition to this, the study further revealed that only one in six was fully self-supporting at the time of follow-up, 38% percent had been diagnosed with emotional disturbances, and 42% of the sample had already fathered or given birth to a child.
Later the Pathways to College Study, involving a smaller, yet generous representative sample of 767 adolescents was conducted using the public child welfare agencies of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin in 2002 (Courtney, 2005). The sample included adolescents who had reached the age of 17 while having been in the welfare system for at least one year. Of the 767 individuals chosen for the study, 732 agreed to complete either an in-person or telephone interview for an overall response rate of 95.4 percent (Courtney, 2005).

This study revealed that with almost 60% of the adolescents reporting a history of neglect, nearly 30% reporting sexual abuse, and the remaining 10% having experienced compromised parenting from their primary caregivers, over one-third of the youth reported wanting a particular independent living service, but never receiving it (Courtney, 2005). Another notable aspect of the study was that the respondents maintained high educational aspirations, and hoped to graduate from college in spite of the challenges they faced (Courtney, 2005). Also, this particular research team considered college attendance as a marker of success when measuring outcomes of ILP services (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger,
2005). Using a comparative analysis, the study identified several external factors associated with college attendance using two groups of former foster youth who were currently attending a four year university. One group participated in ILP while in foster care, and one group did not (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Consistent with literature on resilience, the study found that having role models and significant people in their lives, such as those found in ILP programs were among some of the most successful external factors that could predict positive outcomes (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Positive outcomes include completing high school, employment, financial self-sufficiency, college attendance, and participation in social activities and organizations (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

Given the small sample size of the study, it is suggested that the findings be interpreted with caution (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Its objective was to examine trends of former foster youth who were enrolled in ILP services while in foster care compared to those who were not. The two groups were compared in terms of their demographics, experiences in foster care, educational experiences, the independent living skills
they were taught while in foster care, and experiences since exiting care. In addition to using ethnographic interview data with ILP coordinators, the study examined typical and unique ILP services offered (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Such services included a multi-method/multiphase approach, which consisted of a survey mailed to former foster youth currently attending several colleges within a large state university system, and using the following two comparison groups: low-income students attending college, and former foster youth not attending college (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

Non-probability purposive sampling methods were employed to recruit former foster youth attending college on 11 targeted state university campuses. Based on sampling methods used in the pilot for the Pathways to College study, students were accessed through the financial aid records at each campus site (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Findings indicated that ILPs played an important role in the transition of foster youth into young adulthood (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Although the ILP group may have been more at-risk than their non-ILP peers, the comparable successes between the two groups (e.g., attendance at a four year university) suggests
that ILP could act as a protective factor for youth who face more difficult challenges while in foster care; however, more research in this area is needed in order to draw these conclusions (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Results suggesting close connections between ILP participants and their caseworkers and counselors also mirror previous research on the importance of non-parental adults who provide support and guidance for at-risk youth, and suggest that ILPs may be a useful mechanism through which to form these connections (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

In 2003, Ansell’s Continuum of Independent Living Preparation model remains the most impressive fit for a guiding theory when researching this subject (Cook as cited in Baeza & Thurston, 2003). According to this theory, there are four distinct phases on the road to self-sufficiency (Baeza & Thurston, 2003). Phase-one involves an informal learning stage in which basic living skills are learned through mimicking family members. Phase-two incorporates formal learning where the individual learns basic living skills through formal
instruction and participation. Phase-three is also known as supervised practice. Here, the individual learns through the experience of living on his or her own and having to be self-sufficient while enjoying a parental safety net. Finally, phase-four consists of self-sufficiency where the young person is viewed as a mature adult, and is expected to financially support him or herself without the security of a parental safety net (Baeza & Thurston, 2003).

When applying this theory to emancipated youth, it is obvious due to substantially different circumstances that they are unable to complete the four phases in a traditional manner (Baeza & Thurston, 2003). Foster youth do not have the convenience of being able to watch and model family members who go to work every day. They are not able to gain the job skills that phase-two would bring because foster youth usually change schools too frequently to be able to become involved in any extracurricular activities that would provide some skills. Finally, foster youth are expected to mature and become self-sufficient at an earlier age since they are released from the system by age 18 (Baeza & Thurston, 2003). As a result, while most young people are acquiring
their first job to satisfy the requirements of phases three and four to pay for things like school proms, foster youth are finding work to survive and are unable to use their parents as a safety-net (Baeza & Thurston, 2003).

According to Mahler and McCall (2002) Bandura’s Social Learning Theory remains the dominant approach in previous research. Under this theory, individuals learn by observing others and their outcomes (Mahler & McCall 2002). When applying this theory to the former foster youth population, they are at a disadvantage. Many emancipated youth have been unable to observe stable homes, and are in need of exposure to steadier environments that will mirror appropriate life skills. Another popular approach that has guided research on emancipated youth in ILP programs is Family Systems Theory. According to this theory, a change in one part of the family affects the entire family system (Mahler & McCall 2002). When applying this theory to solutions for emancipated youth, it is primarily used as a message for communities that do not realize the impact 20,000 emancipating youths each year can have. The systems
theory is used to bring awareness and to hopefully spark interest in mentorship.

While a multitude of services for emancipated youth are in place, foster youth are still faring poorly academically, economically and socially than their peers overall (Courtney, 2005). Many are struggling with health and mental health problems and are finding themselves involved in the criminal justice system (Courtney, 2005). According to the Office of Program Analysis and Government Accountability (2004), youth in foster care lack sufficient guidance in learning the skills necessary to function on their own once they exit the welfare system at age 18. Once youth age out of the system, they automatically become eligible for aftercare and transition services. These services are vital in helping youth function as productive citizens with skills needed for school, employment, obtaining housing and protecting their health (2004).

Since transitioning youth are already an overlooked population in the child welfare system (Propp, 2003) this may explain why there is little qualitative research regarding their poor outcomes regarding self-sufficiency. Propp confirms that only a few studies have provided
current information and those who work in child welfare know little about the functioning of emancipated youth once they leave care, and even less about program components that lead to successful outcomes. It is believed that there is tension between the permanency-planning framework and independent living outcomes. The independent living approach conflicts with the desired results of permanency planning, which emphasize family preservation, reunification and adoption (Propp, 2003).

While this study builds on current findings in order to establish the status quo, it differs in terms of approach in finding contributing factors in the successes of some and the failures of others who participate in transitional after care programs. Finally, studies such as Westat and the Midwest project have increased the knowledge of the emancipated youth population; however, the lack of qualitative approaches still begs the question, how youth in transitional housing perceive independent living programs and aftercare service.
Summary

Very little qualitative research has been done to gain a better clientele perspective on why certain outcomes of transitional housing programs are failing. The programs are there, the funding has passed, and the assistance is available, yet outcome assessments seem favorable only when the sizes are small. In addition to this, most studies with impressive sample sizes, such as the Westat project and Cook study are dated. In regards to former and current theories used with this population, most are rooted in social learning theory; however, Dorothy Ansell’s Continuum of Independent Living Preparation seems to be a custom fit when applying theory to emancipated youth in after care. Finally, with a staggering 20,000 youth emancipating from foster care each year, and their overall reported outcomes lacking documented improvement, more qualitative research is imperative.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter reviews the methods used in exploring the perceptions of emancipated youth regarding the quality of aftercare and transitional housing services at Cameron Hill Associates. Attention is given to the study’s qualitative design, sampling method, data collection, instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to gain better insight from former foster youth who are utilizing aftercare service programs while residing in transitional housing at Cameron Hill Associates. Research has suggested that although there are many services available to emancipated youth in independent living programs (ILPs), the overall outcome for this population remains both poor as well as understudied. Using a qualitative method, this design employs face-to-face interviews with eight residents in the transitional housing program at Cameron Hill. The interview consists of several closed as well as
open-ended questions. These questions are designed to encourage the participants to elaborate on their answers, and not to feel conditioned to give favorable responses about the program. As a result, better insight was gathered in areas that were not initially considered when designing the study, thereby providing information that a quantitative approach would overlook. One limitation to this design is that this study is unable to cover a larger population sample in a timely manner.

In order for Cameron Hill Associates to make better-informed decisions concerning their clients, they must be aware of how their clients perceive their services. This study explores this population’s overall perception on how aftercare services are administered, what the program does well, where the program can specifically improve, what responsibility the client has in making the program a success, and the client’s confidence level as they approach their exit date. Thus, the research question answered is “How do youth in transitional housing perceive independent living programs and aftercare service?”
Sampling

The selection criteria for participants in this study required that participants resided in Cameron Hill's transitional housing program, and received independent living skills services. The Cameron Hill staff helped identify eight youth who met those criteria. Non-random, face-to-face convenience sampling was the logical method for sampling the youths' perceptions of these services. The small size of the sample group in this study was based on two main factors: the small number of participants in the program (twelve youths maximum) and the time constraints of the research team (two researchers) who conducted the interviews, transcribed and interpreted the data. The process of interpreting the data is an arduous task. Data must be written verbatim and then coded before inferences can be drawn.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected via face-to-face, thirty-minute, tape-recorded interviews at the five-unit Cameron Hill transitional housing residence and the two-bedroom Mommy and Me residence. Each researcher asked open-ended
questions from an interview guide (Appendix C) that included (among various topics) inquiries about demographics, overall satisfaction with the aftercare and transitional living services, and questions regarding motivating factors. Demographic questions included age, gender, ethnicity, national origin, time (in years) with birth family, time (in years) with foster families, number of foster care placements, history of controlled-substance abuse (self or family), history of mental illness (self or family), current number of close friends, and family networks. The questions regarding satisfaction with aftercare services and transitional housing addressed the aspects of the program that each participant believed worked well, and those areas that did not. For example, participants were asked how useful they found the training in helping them to live independently. Participants were asked if they found some training more useful or better designed than others. They were asked to identify general shortcomings of the program as well as program strengths.

In reference to the program’s services, each participant was asked to reflect upon personal reasons for remaining in after care services. As stated
previously, it was anticipated that each participant would possess different levels of motivation for remaining in the program based on personal experiences in life and environmental influences throughout childhood. With that in mind, the intention of the study was also to determine which aspects of the program brought out the best and worst in each participant. For example, a participant may have specified that a service, or a particular aspect of a service, induced apathetic responses. That is important information for the program staff. If, on the other hand, a participant acknowledged that a lack of motivation was an inherent part of his or her personality, the researcher asked the question “what can or should the program do, in your opinion, to help you compensate for that?” The answer to this question is equally important to the program staff from the standpoint of developing appropriate interventions that yield higher success rates.

A potential limitation in the data collection method of this research includes both participant and researcher bias. Participants in face-to-face interviews may provide responses that they believe are correct or desired just as they would when responding to test questions. By
providing correct answers, instead of what they actually believe, participants may feel that on a moral level they have scored high or that they have done the right thing. They are, therefore, not subject to reproach from their own consciences or from persons who oppose their views. Another possible cause for biased responses is that participants may avoid giving negative feedback for fear of facing potential repercussions.

To avert these types of responses, the researchers assured each respondent that his or her identity and individual responses were strictly confidential. The participants were informed that the answers they gave would be reported in group form only. The participants were also reminded that their feedback would have the greatest value to the research if made without regard to correctness or fear of repercussion.

Procedures

Prior to the study, the researchers met with Cameron Hill Director, Mrs. Omiya Nicole Thurston-Venable to collaborate on procedures. As a result, it was agreed that Mrs. Venable would approach prospective participants who were enrolled in Cameron Hill’s transitional housing
program and ask if they were willing to volunteer their
time. Those who agreed to the interview and gave their
consent to be tape-recorded were used as participants in
the interviews. There were thirty-six questions, and each
interview lasted approximately twenty minutes. Prior to
the interview, packets stating the purpose of the study
were given to each participant to review. Following the
interview, a debriefing statement was provided, and for
their participation, respondents were given $5.00.
Participants were asked if they could be contacted within
30 days should additional information be necessary.

Protection of Human Subjects
The identity of each participant was held in strict
certainty. While a code number was assigned to each
interviewee, a list showing the names and corresponding
code numbers were only available to the researchers. All
lists, audiotapes and transcripts were destroyed upon
completion of the data collection and analysis.
Participants were informed of all aspects of the study,
including voluntary participation, risks and benefits. In
addition, participants were given a debriefing statement
listing contact information for available counseling
services in case that participation in the study resulted in discomfort or distress.

Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative data analysis. The data was collected via tape-recorded interview sessions, and was then written verbatim into transcripts. The transcripts were coded to identify and label relevant segments of information known as meaning-units. The meaning-units were identified and sorted. Eventually the meaning-units were classified into similar groups, and placed into categories based on those similarities (Grinell & Unrau). Such categories were given names based on the concept they identify. For example, self-concept: hopeless could be the name of a category where a participant feels hopeless. The researchers identified themes that emerged from the data set.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methods that were used in exploring the perceptions of emancipated youth regarding the quality of the transitional housing program, and aftercare services at Cameron Hill. Details regarding the study's qualitative design, sampling method, data
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter covers the presentation of the findings from eight short, face-to-face interviews with Cameron Hill’s aftercare participants. Specific coverage included demographic percentages as well as length of time spent in the program at the time of the interview. Participants revealed personal background patterns as well as program perspectives that were common to most. Similarities also appeared regarding complaints, satisfaction levels and future plans.

Presentation of the Findings

Cameron Hills’ transitional housing residence is comprised of two separate residences. One is a five-unit, apartment-like complex (two participants to one unit) with only six participants living there at the time of the study, and the other is a single family dwelling that accommodates a maximum of two teen mothers and their babies. Since participation in this housing program requires that each youth completed at least 80% of his or her case plan while in foster care, it can only be
assumed that the housing complex is not filled because many of the youth who apply have fallen short of their case plan goals.

Participant Demographics

Among the participants, there is an even split in gender ranging in ages from 18-21, but most are at age 18. All but one of the tenants is a United States citizen, and most are California natives. The non-U.S. native is from Mexico. In regards to race, the participants are predominately African American. The remainder is either Hispanic, Caucasian, or mixed race.

Participants' Background

Six of Cameron Hills' participants affirmed that they have a history of abuse and/or neglect. The remaining two claimed to have no history of abuse or neglect; however, they did not specify why they were removed from their birth families. Only a few of those who claimed to have a history of abuse and/or neglect disclosed the specific reasons for their removal.

In regards to length of time in the system, 50% experienced long-term foster care, and were in the system nearly 10 years or longer before entering aftercare. The
other 50% had only been in the system for a short time, ranging from less than a year to four years. One reportedly entered the system one month before his 18th birthday after having been a run-away since he was twelve. All of the participants are still in contact with their families, and all but one reportedly continues to depend on relatives for outside support. In addition, five of the eight participants had experienced “foster care drift,” which means they were placed with multiple foster families while in foster care. One had experienced severe foster care drift and even lost count of the number of placements after the 15th one. At the time of this interview, most of the participants had already been with Cameron Hill’s transitional housing program anywhere from two weeks to eight months.

When the participants were asked if they or their family members had a history of mental illness, five answered no, two specified that they themselves did, and a third indicated that family members did. When asked if any of the participants or their family members had a history of substance abuse, most answered affirmatively and immediately indicated that it was a family member so
that the researchers would not assume that the participant did.

Three of the eight Cameron Hill participants have one child and are not married. Two are mothers and one is a father. The two mothers reside in a separate residential program called, Mommy and Me. The mothers are able to live with their babies in a child friendly home that is located in a quiet neighborhood. The third parent resides in the main housing residence with the other five tenants. His son lives out of state, and he has no contact. One of the participants in the Mommy and Me program was grateful for the separate service because she was able to raise her child in the company of someone with a similar childbearing and child raising experience. She was glad not to be with the other non-parent participants because they lacked that experience. Both mothers expressed gratitude that the aftercare workers really seemed to take extra initiative by making sure that these young mothers made it to their various appointments even though it was after hours for the workers.
Cameron Hill Services

Although the ILP life skills classes are a major service for emancipating youth before and after exiting the system, none of the participants voluntarily considered it a service when asked if they could name the different programs offered through Cameron Hill. Six of the eight participants named some type of transportation assistance as the one service they could name — specifically a program called Car Match, which is where the after care program matches dollar for dollar the same amount that the participant puts down for a car down payment. The other two felt that the actual housing was the only service offered to them.

When asked about ILP classes, some participants considered it as a service that they liked. One admitted that the main reason she liked the ILP classes is because she was paid to go. Another stated that the ILP classes taught her things that her foster parents did not, such as money management and controlling medication, etc. When the youth were asked what they did not like about the services, three mentioned that the 10:00 P.M. curfew was a main irritation. They felt that because they pay rent, and are legal of age, a curfew was not conducive to the
other real world training that they were receiving. Additional complaints were made about not being allowed to have friends or family over for visitation. One participant felt that a two-month response time for repairs caused hardship when her clothes dryer broke down but that was her only complaint.

Seeking Help

When seven of the eight participants were asked to whom they turn when services seem to fail, none stated that they turn to the Cameron Hill housing and program management. Four residents said that they call their aftercare worker, and three others said that they turn to connections outside the program, such as a boyfriend/girlfriend or former foster parent. Of the three who turned to outside help, one did so out of fear of being kicked out of Cameron Hill if they complained. Another claimed that when he turned to his aftercare worker, he was unable to reach that worker after leaving several messages.

Motivational Factors

A few of the residents felt that transitional living in and of itself was motivation enough to complete the
program so that they could move into independent living as soon as possible. Others felt motivated whenever the staff encouraged them, but most of the residents stated that the life skills classes empowered them and helped them to look ahead toward the future with more optimism.

When asked what specific topics were covered in the classes, most of the residents mentioned sex education and how to manage their money.

Participants' Perception of Program Effectiveness

When asked what services the residents wished Cameron Hill would add or modify, over half of the residents came up with different suggestions. One mentioned that it would be nice if the aftercare workers were more involved in their lives to offer more hands-on guidance, and to extend their stay. Both residents in the Mommy and Me program felt that six months was not enough time to get their lives in order, and suggested that Cameron Hill extend it for those who are doing their best, but simply need a few more months. Other suggestions included hiring more available aftercare workers, lifting or at least extending the curfew, allowing friends and family to visit within reason, and
either lowering the rent or being less restrictive with the rules.

Six of the eight participants who felt that there was room for program improvement and who offered suggestions were also asked if their attitude could be part of the problems experienced in transitional housing. As a result, three admitted that their attitudes were part of the problem in some circumstances, and two felt that the problem was from both ends — meaning their attitudes started where the services seem to stop. When asked what the program should do to help them regulate their attitudes so that they could be more amenable to the program's services, a few participants said that the program administrators should talk to them in a supportive way. This did not appear to be one of the program's strengths.

A few participants made it a point to express gratitude for the overall housing program, but were disgruntled regarding a lack of pest control. One participant spoke of superior after care housing services in a neighboring county:

"Well, I'm just going to say I've seen better like the one in Riverside, they have visitation
hours...we have no visitation. They have
umm...they give groceries...we have to buy our
groceries when we first come here...you ain’t
got no groceries...to bad...you better get out
there and start working or something. And
umm...you know...well I’ve seen better...you
know cuz...I mean...gotta mention this too...we
got rats...so there’s some ups and downs, but
for the most part it’s pretty good."

Others complained of poor management, and the lack
of privacy. When prompted for specifics, one participant
felt that the housing management played favorites and
abused its authority by frequently entering the apartment
unannounced to hold inspections.

Interviewer: What about the housing service?
Participant: The housing’s all right, but [name
omitted] plays favorites, and I don’t
like that.

Interviewer: Okay, let’s see...

Participant: He’s taken his authority figure, and
pushin’ it.

Interviewer: Like how?
Participant: Well, like...cause he told me I was the only one who had a key to this apartment, and then the next thing you know, he’s just walking in. No knocking, nothing, just walking in.

Additional complaints suggested that the housing management was not sufficiently involved with participants and remained mostly isolated. A second participant experienced several break-ins, found things missing (including food) and after reporting it, felt that the housing management remained aloof regarding the matter. The same participant attributed many of the break-ins to the fact that he was the only one with a telephone in his apartment. He declared that he would often find unfamiliar numbers dialed on his caller ID and on his phone bill. The same participant did not like the fact that the rules seemed to change after he moved in. When asked for specific instances, the participant implied that the rent was raised incrementally in a seemingly unreasonable fashion until it reached the $500 maximum cap a month.
The Overall Grade

Overall, there was a split in housing satisfaction. Of the four who claimed, they were not pleased, one stated that while the program has positive aspects, he does not like the fact that they have rats, and that the accommodations at Cameron Hill are not equivalent to the ones he saw at Riverside's transitional housing. Fortunately, all of the youth interviewed had a specific plan for the future once their stay at Cameron Hill was over, and could think of someone in their lives they would hate to disappoint. Of this percentage, all but one verbalized plans of continuing higher education, and three actually named a specific degree or career in the helping professions that they planned to pursue. While all of the participants expressed confidence that they would succeed post aftercare services, six of the eight participants did not attribute their confidence levels to Cameron Hill's aftercare services. Rather, most of the youth felt that they were already self-confident when they entered transitional housing. In addition, when the youth were asked if any knew a former resident who had graduated from Cameron Hill, three of the residents were able to recall a Cameron Hill success story.
Summary

Cameron Hill is comprised of two separate residences: one has six single tenants, and the other has two mothers with their babies. Altogether there was an even split in gender, most are California natives, and predominately African American. While none of the residents considered their life skills classes an actual service, most of them gave it favorable mention as a source of motivation. The top services mentioned were the actual housing, the Car Match program, and transportation to and from various appointments by staff members. While most expressed confidence about eventually having to exit aftercare services, few attributed their confidence levels to the program because they felt it was already part of their personality.

Overall, there was a 50/50 split in program satisfaction. While all residents expressed gratitude for safe housing, many felt that there should not be a curfew because they are paying rent and are of legal age. Others complained of rodents, slow response time for repairs, favoritism, lack of privacy, and desired more aftercare workers for closer guidance.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the major findings of the study are discussed along with recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research regarding after care services at Cameron Hill. A brief rationale of the study’s limited scope is discussed along with the study’s limitations and the researchers’ conclusions.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore the views of emancipated youth who are current participants in a transitional housing and aftercare service program. During the study's design stage, the researchers chose to limit the scope of the study to San Bernardino’s Cameron Hill aftercare program, which at the time of the study provided transitional housing for eight out of twelve possible participants. While there was an even split in gender, the majority of residents were African American. Two of the participants resided in a home for teen mothers and their children called Mommy and Me, and the remaining six resided in an apartment-style housing
complex. The age range for all participants was from 18-21, and most had been in the program for three months or less. The researchers were specifically interested in determining the degree of participant satisfaction in regard to Cameron Hill’s services.

It is unfortunate that Cameron Hill has only twelve beds to accommodate a large and growing population. The fact that only eight out of twelve beds are filled begs the questions, why there are four beds empty, or why there is not a waiting list, or what it is about the case plan goals that seem to disqualify more emancipated youth from obtaining or maintaining eligibility criteria for the service. Although homelessness is a big issue among emancipated youth, letting youth live on the street because they are under qualified for aftercare is also not a solution to the problem.

Although all of the participants at Cameron Hill were grateful for the housing, some were on the verge of setting unrealistic goals and risking too early of an exit date from the program just to depart. The researchers found that some of participants were disgruntled with Cameron Hill’s services, but also noticed that most of them appeared to be on the path to
independence. While motivational reasons for remaining with Cameron Hill were examined, the perceived inequities of the house rules and the inadequacies of the housing itself seemed to act as reinforcement for some participants to move out as soon as possible. For example, with the exception of the Mommy and Me program participants, the participants who reside in the housing unit complex complained of rodents. While interviewing onsite, the researchers also noticed signs of poor maintenance, such as dilapidated kitchen countertops and broken appliances.

Key findings revealed that most of the participants appreciated the housing and some participants appreciated the extra attention that some of the available staff members provided in order to transport them to various appointments and meet their needs. In reference to receiving help in regulating their own attitudes when these were the source of motivational issues, a few participants said that the program administrators should talk to them in a supportive way. That, however, did not appear to occur on a regular basis. There were few who agreed with the 10:00 P.M. curfew, and even fewer who agreed with the amount of rent required each month.
However, all of the participants expressed confidence about their exit date along with specific plans for the future, and their ability to live independently post aftercare. In addition to this, most of the participants were able to offer specific suggestions as to how the program could improve. One suggestion was to hire more aftercare workers who could offer more hands-on guidance to program participants. Overall, key findings revealed that exactly half of all participants interviewed expressed that the benefits at Cameron Hill outweighed the disadvantages.

Limitations

This study examined responses from aftercare service participants in relation to their attitudes, motivations and degree of participation in an aftercare service program. However, the aftercare service provider's perspective on the participants' satisfaction and motivation levels was not elicited. In omitting those insights from one-half of the aftercare partnership, a limitation was generated. In essence, the researchers acquired only a partial account of all available information. Whereas the participants were asked to
reflect mostly on their own overall impressions of the program, its positive attributes and deficits (and only minimally on their own individual issues) the program staff could have been engaged to give their impressions of the participants as well.

In addition, studying aftercare service participants who are currently involved in a program was practical because the participants were able to relate their existing feelings and attitudes immediately. On the other hand, a limitation was created because several of the participants in this study were new to the program and could furnish only a limited account of the services.

Furthermore, the scope of this study was limited to current residents of Cameron Hill. Due to time and limited outreach ability, researchers were unable to expand the study to include the satisfaction levels of postgraduates of Cameron Hill at their present stage of independence. At best, researchers were only able to ask current participants if they could recall a Cameron Hill success story.

The study was also limited in that it was unable to compare and contrast the living conditions of residents before and after entering Cameron Hill; neither could the
study investigate emancipated youth who had turned down after care services along with their reasons for doing so. In addition, one participant pointed out that he had knowledge of better accommodations in an aftercare service in Riverside County. However, because of time and resource limitations, the researchers were unable to expand this study to include a second county’s program.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Youth in aftercare services like those at Cameron Hill are generally out of the social worker’s realm of concern because they have reached the age of emancipation and are no longer the responsibility of the Department of Children’s Services (DCS). However, a recommendation for DCS social workers who have adolescent foster children in their caseloads is that the best time to help children begin planning for independent living is early — long before they reach the age of emancipation. When foster children are at or near the age of 14, their social worker should meet with them and examine a comprehensive overview of pre-emancipation ILP services as well as post-emancipation aftercare options. This is to help them begin to explore and formulate a plan for successful
independent living. The social worker should carefully review the eligibility prerequisites with the adolescent for each type of program and explore additional options as well. Those options might include career advancement through resources ranging from Job Corps to the U.S. Armed Forces. It became apparent to the researchers after interviewing several participants that many of them might have been in a more auspicious position if a social worker had worked with them in that role before they emancipated from foster care.

Prior to this study, few studies from the past could be found of Cameron Hill. Because aftercare and transitional housing services are necessary and beneficial for the post-foster care youth, quality should be a high priority in these programs to further the basic values and ethics of social work, which call for service, dignity and worth of the person in the NASW code of ethics. If great lengths are taken to ensure that businesses operate efficiently using basic quarterly evaluations, then the same considerations could be taken with aftercare and for very little cost. If this were done in aftercare programs, participants would be more
empowered and able to exercise more leadership, change and possibly mentorship for their own population.

In addition, policies should be designed that implement more guidance into aftercare programs for each participant. The reasons for this are evident according to the findings in the Bowlby and Ainsworth’s study, which revealed that humans require more than just provision for the body to develop properly; they have to feel connected to someone as well (Bretherton, 1992).

While several of the participants were able to recall certain after care workers who provided extra support in helping meet their needs, the number of aftercare workers who did not offer more guidance and support reveal that the system needs further improvement.

Recommendations for research include further study that could examine and explain the reason why with such a nationally recorded growing population of emancipating youth, San Bernardino has a shortage of facilities and stringent requirements to enter aftercare services and transitional housing. In addition, it seems that the continued outside support that participants claim to have with relatives is worth investigating. These searches and outside ties could be viewed as strengths while
researching ways to build upon them with programs and services that can possibly foster even more unity, mentorship, and reunification of the family. Now that the youth are adults, different dynamics can be taught to help emancipated youth deal with parents who are mentally ill or continue to be substance abusers. Because life skills include learning to deal with family problems from an adult’s perspective despite whether parents and relatives have stopped abusive behavior, these types of topics could be implemented into the life skills curriculum, which already covers important subjects such as sex and finances.

Conclusion

This study examined the views of emancipated youth who are current participants in Cameron Hill’s transitional housing and aftercare service program. The study gained insight into participants’ perceptions of the quality of aftercare services received, as well as the program’s effectiveness on desired outcomes. Key findings revealed that while a few residents disapproved of certain house rules, all expressed high regard for the life skills classes, and felt confident about their exit
date from aftercare. Specific recommendations for social work policy include implementation of more guidance into the program for each resident and further research to investigate the lack aftercare services and transitional housing available to a growing population of aging out foster youth.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore perceptions regarding transitional housing at Cameron Hill. This study is being conducted by Richard Vela and Savannah VanKummer under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, professor of Social Work Research at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Dept. of Social Work Institutional Review Board subcommittee, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to share your perception of services at Cameron Hill. The interview will be audio taped, and should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses. All data will be reported in group formation only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion on March 31st in the Social Work Department at California State University, San Bernardino.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any question and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study; however, the benefits are that the social welfare system will be able to gain more insight and make more informed decisions regarding emancipated youth in the future.

When you have completed the interview, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask that you not discuss this study with other students or participants. Your cooperation will aid in maintaining or improving aftercare services at Cameron Hill. As a result, there is no risk to your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at 537-5001.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark here         Today's date ____________________

Place a check mark here         Today's date ____________________
APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Study of Resident's Perceptions Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed was designed to explore perceptions regarding aftercare services at Cameron Hill Associates. In this study, two perceptions were assessed: What you like and dislike about aftercare services while in transitional housing. We are particularly interested in your confidence level regarding your exit date.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the decision question with other residents. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Richard Vela, Savannah VanKummer or Dr. Janet Chang at 909/537-5501. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909/537-5501 at the end of Spring Quarter 2006.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide

Demographics

1. What is your ethnicity?
2. Which is your country of origin? (If USA, which State?)
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age?
5. How long (in years and months) were you in foster care?
6. How long (in years and months) was it before you were removed from your family of origin?
7. How many foster care placements have you had?
8. Do you know your birth family or relatives?
9. Do you (or a family member) have a history of controlled-substance use?
10. Do you (or a family member) have a history of mental illness?
11. Do you have a history of neglect or abuse?
12. Do you know why you were removed from your birth family?
13. Do you have children?
14. Do have a network of friends outside or inside the program? How many?
15. Do have a network of family support outside of the program?
General Questions

1. Which services do you currently receive from aftercare ILP? (list)
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

2. What do you like, or what works for you about each service? (list)
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

3. What do you not like, or what does not work for you about each service? (list)
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

4. What do you do (who do you talk to) when services do not work for you?

5. What is it about a service that makes you feel motivated to learn the skill?

6. What is it about a service that makes you feel unmotivated to learn the skill?

7. Are all services/training useful – which ones are, which ones are not? (list)
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

8. What do you wish were offered that is currently not offered?

9. What changes would you make in the services you receive?
10. Do you see yourself (your attitude, learning ability, motivation) as part of the problem when you believe a program or service is ineffective? (If yes, answer #11)

11. (If yes to #10) What can or should the program do, in your opinion, to help you compensate for that?

12. Do you think you will succeed at living independently when you leave here?

13. In your opinion, what needs should aftercare services meet? Do you feel that these needs are being met?

14. How long have you been in transitional housing with Cameron Hill?

15. What motivates you to stick with the services offered by Cameron Hill?

16. Based on what you have experienced in transitional housing so far, are you pleased with the services?

17. What are some specific plans you have for yourself once you leave transitional housing?

19. Is there anyone who you would really hate to let down?

20. (If confident about exit date) How much of your confidence do you feel is a direct result of the services at Cameron Hill?

21. Do you have friends or siblings who have used the aftercare services at Cameron Hill? If so, how have they fared?
REFERENCES


Propp, J., Ortega, D. M., (2003). Independence or interdependence: Rethinking the transition from ward of the court to adulthood. State Legislatures, 28 (8) 24
This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Savannah VanKummer & Richard Vela